EATER
OF
WORLDS
BANANA CHAN:
The Retired Hero & The Quiet Sea

BANANA CHAN:
The Retired Hero & The Quiet Sea

A story in the Banana Chan Multiverse

by Alan Holman

(c) 2026 – Alan Holman

This is a work of fiction.

Dedicated with love to someone who hates me.

Chapter 1: The Briny Breeze of Returning Home

The town of Rain was a four-mile-by-four-mile square of salted breezes, whispering forests, and perpetual melodrama. In spring, cherry blossoms drifted across the pavement like pink confetti; in autumn, the leaves crackled underfoot like dry parchment. It was the kind of photogenic seaside hamlet that felt less like a real place and more like the setting of a late-night anime series no one watched.

And I, unfortunately, was back in it.

"I wonder if anything at home has changed in those few years we lived in Tokyo," my mother mused from behind the steering wheel as our sedan glided along the coastal highway. She was a woman who stood six-foot-four, possessed jet-black hair, and sported bright orange eyebrows—a anatomical quirk that somehow looked completely normal on her.

I stared out the passenger window, clutching my knees. At eleven years old, I was barely four-foot-eight, almost completely tomboyish, and carrying a grudge heavy enough to sink a fishing vessel.

"I hope those girls who treated me badly got run over by a fleet of cement mixers," I muttered dryly.

"They won't even recognize you," Mom offered with a light chuckle, glancing at my dyed blonde hair. "Not with your hair like that. Or with your new name."

"Banana," I corrected silently. My real name was Lacy, but Lacy was the girl who cried when people shoved her into snowbanks. Banana—a name I gave myself, combined with the surname Chan from a distant Chinese branch of our family tree—was someone who didn't cry.

My hair was dyed blonde, but my natural auburn roots and my favorite color—orange—still shone through in my eyebrows. It was a small rebellion, but in a town like Rain, small rebellions tend to attract large consequences.

Case in point: the principal’s office the very next morning.

"Why do you refuse to remove that headband?" the middle-aged administrator demanded, tapping his mahogany desk.

"It's my choice what I wear and when I wear it," I replied, crossing my arms.

"If you don't remove that headband, I will have no choice but to expel you."

A lump formed in my throat. *No!* I snapped at myself mentally. *I must be stronger than to cry over stupid things like this!*

"I'm going to count to three," the principal warned.

"Fine," I grumbled, snatching the headband off. "But only because my head was getting hot."

He leaned forward, narrowing his eyes. "Orange eyebrows under blonde hair means your hair has been dyed. The dress code strictly states natural hair colors only."

By afternoon, I had abandoned the school grounds for the local arcade, seeking solace in a puzzle game. That was where *they* found me.

Yoshi, Minako, and Nozomi—the triumvirate of my childhood torment.

"You're the new girl in class!" Minako chirped, stepping up to my cabinet. "Was your name Banana?"

Oh, like you don't know who I am, I thought bitterly. Your bullying is the exact reason I moved to Tokyo in the first place.

"We were stupid," Minako continued, offering a warm, absurdly friendly smile. "We loved your headband."

"Yeah, it was really cool!" Yoshi chimed in.

"Very cool and very brave!" Nozomi added.

I blinked, thoroughly disoriented. "Thankies... but what do you girls actually want with me?"

Minako leaned in, her eyes shining with alarming enthusiasm. "Be our friend!"

That night, I lay awake in my bedroom, staring past the ceiling at the stars. Rain was supposed to be my home, but my heart was still stuck in Tokyo with Boden—a thin, silver-haired boy who played tag, softball, and soccer with me under the cherry trees. He was the only person I had ever trusted completely.

I feel like I belong here in Rain, yet I only felt alive with him, I thought with a heavy sigh. Maybe when we're older, he'll come here... or maybe he'll arrive on a white horse in my darkest hour to rescue me.

I stared at the ceiling for ten more minutes.

"Darn it... I can't sleep," I groaned.

Downstairs in the kitchen, I found Mom standing in front of the open refrigerator, eating leftover cold rice.

"Can't sleep either?" she asked.

"Not even a little," I said.

Before dawn, we crept up the rusty fire ladder behind the old lighthouse on the eastern edge of town. Reaching the metal roof, Mom placed a gentle hand on my shoulder as the first rays of morning lit the square layout of Rain. Below us lay four miles of ocean wind, dark forests, and a quiet pond tucked away near the treeline where a large rock sat—just big enough for someone to sit and dip their toes in.

"The town of Rain," Mom whispered softly. "Home."

"Sure," I muttered, hugging my jacket around myself. "But I can't help feeling a little lost."

"If old man Hazuki finds out we're on his lighthouse, we'll feel a little dead," she added with a smirk.

"If he tries anything, they'll have to identify him by his dental records," I threatened flatly.

"Umm... no," Mom replied.

Chapter 2: A Wet Towel, A Giant Ape, and Other Unreasonable Things

Lunchtime at school arrived with a ominous flourish. Minako slid a neatly folded piece of paper onto my desk.

"A prediction," she murmured mysteriously. "Don't open it now. Open it when you're completely alone."

"Those girls are weird," I muttered under my breath once they drifted away.

Later that afternoon, sitting alone on a park bench while small children kicked a soccer ball across the grass, my curiosity beat my caution. I pulled the note from my purse and unfolded it.

> "If you betray the Emotion 16 Soldiers in any way, then whenever you are empowered and in control of any aspect of your life, the fates will grab that power from you, leading you toward a sour and bitter destiny."

I burst out laughing. "Small-town losers," I snorted, crumpling the paper into a tight ball and tossing it directly into a nearby trash can. "I've spent the last few years in a big city. I don't get spooked by middle school curse chain letters anymore."

To celebrate my newfound maturity, I went straight to the hair salon and had my hair dyed back to its natural orange.

When Mom walked into the salon, her eyes lit up. "There's the Lacy I remember and adore!"

"My name is still Banana," I said firmly, staring at my reflection.

"I didn't realize you were actually serious about the name change."

"I'm serious about everything," I retorted. "You'll see."

"One day you'll be serious about a boy."

"You've never been serious about a boy, so why should I have to?"

SMACK.

The open palm caught my cheek before I could register the motion. A stunned silence filled the salon.

"I'm sorry," Mom gasped immediately, holding her hand.

"So am I," I cold-shouldered.

"I'll never slap you again," she whispered.

"You'd better not, or I'll report you."

The tension dissolved into an uneasy truce by breakfast the next morning, when Mom handed me a letter that had arrived in the post. The return address was our school, signed simply with the letter *"A"*.

> *"Dear Banana,"* I read aloud. "Aside from other members of the Emotion 16 Soldiers, you may only share our secrets with up to one family member who you trust. Otherwise, you have betrayed us. And you know what happens to people who betray us."

"What happens to people who betray them?" Mom asked, taking a sip of tea.

"I forget. I threw the note in the trash," I said. "It's meaningless bullplop anyway."

"Well," Mom suggested cheerfully, "someone obviously wants you to be their friend! Play along with their little club and have fun!"

When I confronted the trio in the school hallway, Minako took one look at my head and gasped. "Hey, your hair's orange again! I almost didn't recognize you!"

"I'm still the new girl," I sighed. "What's the dealio with the Emotion 16 Soldiers?"

"The dealio is that you're a member," Minako stated as if explaining basic math. "And if you refuse, you've betrayed us, and the fates will punish you."

"I don't like ultimatums," I growled. "Emotion 16 Soldiers sounds like a pathetic attempt to manipulate someone into joining a club. Leave me the hell alone!"

They followed me down the hall anyway.

"We can't leave you alone, Banana!" Yoshi pleaded. "You have a power!"

"And you have... a stupid!" I snapped back.

"I'm serious!" Minako insisted. "Monsters are going to arise! One per week, twenty-six weeks a year, from a portal on a pyramid in Egypt! Then the reptilian shape-shifters from Orion who fear human love will send the 'Eater of Worlds'! You're our only hope!"

"LEAVE ME THE HELL ALONE!" I shrieked, bursting through the side exit doors into the schoolyard.

I took three fast steps across the grass—and slammed full-force into a wall of dark fur.

I recoiled, looking up... and up... and up.

Standing thirty feet high in the middle of our schoolyard was King Kong. The giant ape beat his chest and let out a bellowing war cry.

"Eep!" I squeaked.

Yoshi ran out behind me, thrusting her palm toward the monster. "Love!" she screamed. Glowing pink hearts shot from her fingers, striking King Kong in the chest.

The giant ape blinked, purred, reached down, scooped me up, and planted a wet, terrifying kiss right on my face.

"YUCK!" I roared.

"Oops!" Yoshi squeaked.

Minako pushed past her, raising her hand. "Hate!" A pitch-black energy beam blasted King Kong. Infuriated, the ape swung his arm and hurled me across the sky like a thrown baseball.

I skipped across the surface of the ocean three times like a flat stone before sinking into the cold salt water.

As I dragged myself out of the surf onto the sandy beach twenty minutes later, wet, freezing, and utterly furious, Yoshi, Minako, and Nozomi were waiting for me.

Nozomi held out a fresh towel. "Here..."

I wrapped the towel around myself, letting it absorb the seawater. Then, with calculated, cold precision, I grabbed a corner, twirled the heavy wet fabric until it was tightly wound, and whipped Nozomi across her leg with the tag end.

SNAP!

It literally ripped a marble-sized chunk of skin clean off her leg. Nozomi shrieked, collapsing into the sand, clutching her bleeding leg and weeping hysterically.

"Banana, you psychotic fool!" Minako screamed. "Why did you attack Nozomi!?"

"Because a few years ago, before I moved to Tokyo, I was Lacy—remember me!?" I screamed, my voice shaking. "Nozomi nearly killed me when she held my face down in the snow! Not being able to breathe... thinking I was going to die... it was the scariest minute of my life!"

I twirled the wet towel again and struck Nozomi's other leg, ripping out another chunk. Her screams turned into agonizing howls.

I turned toward Yoshi, who was backing away in sheer horror. "Yoshi. Remember that time you tackled me into the mud puddle?"

"Y-yes..." she whimpered.

I dropped the towel and unleashed a rapid-fire flurry of brutal punches to her chest and face until she collapsed, wailing in the sand.

Minako turned to run, but I bolted after her, tripping her into the beach sand. She rolled over just in time to see me leap into the air.

"Nooo!" she shrieked.

Both of my feet landed directly on her midsection. I bounced on her stomach five times like she was a backyard trampoline before stepping off.

As Minako curled into a wheezing fetal position, sobbing into the sand, I stood over the three beaten girls, breathing hard.

"Why the hell was there a King Kong?" I demanded. "And what was with him throwing me into the ocean?"

"Fuck off!" Nozomi gasped from the ground.

I stepped forward and drove my knee directly into her nose.

"This may have been overly violent," I declared to the bloodied sand, "but fuck it—I'm done not standing up for myself! From this point on, no one messes with Banana Chan and gets away with it!"

That evening, the doorbell rang.

Mom opened the door to reveal Nozomi standing on our porch, covered in thick white bandages across her face and legs.

"Hello," Mom said cautiously. "You look... terribly injured."

Nozomi swallowed hard. "I got what I deserved."

I walked up behind Mom. "Hi, Nozomi."

"Oh my god," Mom gasped, her eyes widening as she looked between us. "Banana... did you do that to her face and legs?"

"Yes, Mom."

"Banana!" she scolded.

"It's okay!" Nozomi blurted nervously. "I hurt Banana just as much in the past! We're even now! The other girls agreed—we're even!"

Mom pinched the bridge of her nose. "Are you going to press charges against my daughter?"

"No, ma'am."

"Good," Mom sighed. "Because I hate violence. But if I punish Banana now, it'll ruin this 'even' status you two just established. So Banana, the only way you avoid punishment is if you seriously try to become friends with these girls."

Chapter 3: The Merkaba Sneeze Guard and the Soft-Boiled Apocalypse

Two weeks later, the four of us were sitting in an ice cream parlor, eating sundae bowls and laughing like old pals.

"Despite everything you've told me," I said, wiping chocolate sauce from my chin, "I still don't want to join the Emotion 16 Soldiers."

"We really haven't told you much," Nozomi admitted.

"Exactly. And I'm not joining a group that keeps secrets." I stood up to leave.

"Wait, Banana!" Minako called out. "You have a power! You did far more damage to us in two minutes than any of the giant monsters did!"

I paused, turning back. "Is that why you want me? Because I'm brutal?"

"No," Yoshi chimed in softly. "It's because... you have so much empathy. Empathy is human nature, but yours is anomalous."

I stared at them. "Empathy? I just beat you three into hospital beds!"

"And then you cried about it later, didn't you?" Minako asked quietly.

I bit my lip, feeling tears prick my eyes. "...Yes."

"We didn't cry when we hurt you years ago," Minako admitted. "We lacked empathy. You don't."

I let out a long breath, wiping my cheek. "You guys are crazy. And honestly? I guess I'm crazy too. I'll join your group on a trial basis. If it sucks, I'm out."

My trial basis was put to the test three days later on a small wooden fishing boat in the middle of the bay. We were holding fishing rods when a green, scaled sea monster with sharp fangs erupted from the water, roaring in our faces.

"You've gotta be kidding!" I yelled.

"Banana! Use your power!" Yoshi screamed.

"What *is* my power!?" I yelled back.

Suddenly, out of thin air, a giant fluffy down pillow materialized in my hands.

"That!" Nozomi shouted. "Throw the pillow!"

I hurled the pillow directly into the open jaws of the giant fish. The monster choked on the feathers, gagged, and flopped dead into the water.

Later that afternoon, we met our leader at the beach.

"Frau Angstweiler is 'A'," Yoshi explained. "Normally, she makes her entrance surrounded by falling rose petals..."

Before she could finish, red petals fluttered down from the blue sky. I immediately inhaled a petal and went into a violent, snot-drenched, thirty-second sneezing fit that left me red-faced and gasping for air.

"Stop the rose petals!" Minako shouted to the sky. "She's allergic!"

Frau Angstweiler—a middle-aged woman with reptilian skin, slit eyes, and an elegant purple dress—had to modify her arrival. To protect my sinuses, she summoned a *Merkaba*—two counter-rotating geometric tetrahedrons of blinding light that interlocked around her like a giant energy sneeze-guard.

I had to wear a rubber gas mask inside the magical light geometric ship just to hear her briefing.

"3,647 years ago," Frau Angstweiler rasped through the glowing light walls, "elites from my planet hidden in Egypt... six magic frequencies… the Eater of Worlds!"

"What about the Eater of Worlds?" I asked, my voice muffled by the gas mask filter.

"When it appears, you must deal with it," she said cryptically.

Cut to three years later.

March 2005. I was fourteen years old, five-foot-two, thin, with long orange hair flowing down to my waist. Yoshi, Minako, Nozomi, and I were riding camels across the scorching hot sands of the Egyptian desert, framed by the Great Pyramids.

"Any minute now, the Eater of Worlds will emerge from the portal," Minako warned, checking her watch.

Above the central pyramid, an octagonal checkerboard portal tore open in space-time. Energy crackled. The heavens shook.

And then... nothing came out. The portal vanished.

"Maybe it's invisible?" I offered, squinting under the sun.

Standing atop the peak of the stone pyramid was a tiny, fuzzy baby chick. It was wearing a tiny yellow t-shirt that had the words *"Eater of Worlds"* printed on the front in bold red letters. It cheeped adorably, glaring at us with tiny, angry black eyes.

"Pretty Costume Transform!" I shouted reflexively.

A magical Sailor-Moon-style sequence enveloped me, swapping my denim shorts for a sparkly, highly impractical superhero outfit.

The baby chick opened its beak and spat a blob of brown liquid directly into my open mouth.

Instantly, reality fractured.

My mind tumbled through space. I saw Earth transformed into a cosmic chessboard where human cultures danced in separate squares. I saw twelve giant religious icons trap the dancing humans in spiderwebs until only a single, sad white cat reading a book remained.

"The Eater of Worlds is..." I gasped, hovering in the cosmic void while two cheerful cheerleaders pom-pommed beside me. "...dogmatic religion!"

"Yay, Banana Chan!" the cheerleaders yelled.

My consciousness drifted further into a bizarre entheogenic hallucination. I found myself in a quiet forest where a blonde boy named Adam Sprite sat on a tree branch wearing a grass skirt, playing a piccolo. He jumped down, held my hands, and serenaded me with a bizarre song about how I was a "Nirvana Girl" whose smile freed the guilty. I walked through floating gates of logic, shattered illusions of fashion shows, and curtsied before a cosmic Queen who informed me: "You will bring the next queen into the world, my daughter. Soon you will meet your Prince... he'll be flying a kite."

Doy? I thought in the dream.

When I finally woke up, I was lying in a hospital bed back in Rain, casually eating a bucket of fried chicken while Mom sat in the chair beside me.

"The doctor says you're almost over the shock," Mom noted. "You actually defeated the Eater of Worlds! You saved the universe!"

"Yeah, well, it was a chick," I grumbled, crunching on a drumstick. "And the other girls left an angry message on our machine because I stole their bragging rights. They broke up the team over it."

"Are you upset?" Mom asked.

"No," I said, staring at the ceiling. "They were only in it for the glory anyway. No one messes with Banana Chan and gets away with it."

Chapter 4: Retired at Fourteen and the Boy in the Sky

Fourteen is supposed to be the prime age for a girl in the town of Rain.

It’s the age when the average local girl leads a double life as a magical superhero, battling weekly monsters sent from mysterious portals to save the galaxy. But my superhero career had ended prematurely with a baby chicken and a bucket of fried chicken.

By the summer of 2005, I felt old. My 'final episode' had come too soon. Yoshi, Minako, Nozomi, and I were no longer main characters. We had faded into the background, downgraded to the status of NPCs in our own town.

At first, the transition shuddered through me like an existential crisis. But as weeks passed, a quiet relief took root. Being a background character meant I could sleep in, eat snacks, and play video games without worrying about cosmic space-squids.

I stopped praying for new adventures. I started living.

One bright morning in Sakura Park, I looked up into the clear blue sky and saw a diamond-shaped kite soaring above the trees. Written across the canvas in bold black ink was a single name: *Ryone*.

"So that boy's name is Ryone," I whispered to myself.

"Mom," I said over lunch an hour later, "can we get a dog?"

Mom paused, her chopsticks suspended. "Why do you want a dog?"

"I saw a boy at Sakura Park," I admitted, staring down at my rice bowl. "He's fourteen like me. I want to be his friend, but I'm shy, and a dog is an instant conversation starter."

Mom smirked teasedly. "Ooh, I like where this story is going!"

"It's not like that!" I snapped, turning red. "His name was written on his bike, his backpack, and his kite. Ryone."

That afternoon, we visited the pet store. Standing in front of the glass enclosures, my eyes landed on a fluffy, light-brown dog with a scowling, adorable face.

"That one!" I pointed.

"That breed is a Chow Chow," the clerk offered.

"And his name is Doggie!" I declared, scooping the ball of fur into my arms. I nuzzled my nose against his black tongue. "Doggie... if anything bad ever happens to you, there'll be hell to pay."

The next morning, I took my fluffball down to the local underground skating rink—a massive, vaulted ice facility built deep beneath the town's street level.

While sitting in the bleachers watching people glide across the ice, a boy approached.

He was fourteen, five feet tall, lean, wearing baggy clothes, a yellow baseball cap, and a pair of ripped jeans. When he offered a nervous smile, I caught a glimpse of unusually sharp, almost vampiric canine teeth.

"Can I sit here?" he asked.

"Heya, Ryone!" I blurted. "Sure!"

He sat down, looking startled. "Have we met?"

"No, I saw your name written on your kite in the park."

Ryone blushed, looking down at his sneakers. "Yeah... my dad used to write my name on everything when I was little. It's embarrassing."

"So," I began, trying to break the ice, "how goes?"

"I'm fine," he stammered, sweating profusely. "I'm... pretty nervous, honestly. You're completely cool and collected."

I got a whole dog just to have an excuse to talk to you, I thought, staring at him. And now you approached me first, and you're infinitely more awkward than I imagined. Plus, I forgot to bring the dog.

"Can I get you popcorn?" Ryone blurted out in a rush. "Cotton candy? Burgers? Chinese food? Burritos? Cola?"

"There's a water fountain," I noted flatly.

He rubbed his neck nervously. "Banana is a really cute name."

"Thankies," I replied.

"Do you... want to go out on a date?" he asked softly.

"No thank you, Ryone," I said immediately. "You're sweet, but we just met."

"Have I blown it?" he mumbled, his forehead drenched in cold sweat. "My dad's name is Goro, my sister's Kit, and my mom's Sen—I mean..."

"Just relax, okay?" I laughed gently, placing my palm over his hand.

The moment my skin touched his, Ryone's eyes rolled back, and he pitched forward, fainting dead onto the bleacher bench.

"Not *that* much," I muttered.

While waiting for him to wake up, my mind drifted back to my real past—back when I was Lacy.

I remembered being seven years old in Rain, sitting alone at my school desk reading *Sailor Moon* manga while Minako and her friends laughed at me. I remembered moving to Tokyo to escape.

And I remembered the cherry blossom tree in Tokyo where a silver-haired boy named Boden Powers tripped over me while chasing butterflies.

When I had tried to beat him up in a rage, he had simply laughed and said, "That tickles! Next time someone tries to hurt you, call me and I'll rush in to protect you."

We were soulmates. But when I had to move back to Rain at eleven, our farewell in the middle school lunchroom broke my heart.

"Consider us engaged!" Boden had wept, wrapping his arms around me.

"No!" I had cried, pulling away. *"Don't follow me to Rain! Don't wait for me! Love doesn't make sense!"*

I shook the memory from my head as Ryone stirred on the bleacher bench. I left him with a quick goodbye and walked home.

That evening, Mom was in the rec room, swinging a plastic fly-swatter at a buzzing housefly. The fly landed directly on an empty wooden picture frame hanging on the wall.

Mom swung—CRACK!

The fly dodged it, but the force of the strike knocked the picture frame loose. Behind the backing board, a thick, yellowed ninety-three-page legal document tumbled onto the carpet.

Mom picked it up and read the front cover:

> Covert Arrangement to Merge Reg Chan's Specialty Constructions with Edward Hazuki's Constructive Installations, by Method of Arranged Marriage between Lacy Chan and Ryone Hazuki.

Mom blinked, flipping through the pages. "...Arranged to maintain a genetic program... Babylonian leadership lineage..."

She closed the file slowly, her face going pale.

"Oh dear," she whispered into the empty room. "Banana is really, *really* not going to like this."

Chapter 5: Tropes, Love Letters, and Unwanted Backstories

The morning after the arranged marriage contract was discovered, I found myself sitting at my desk in class, staring out the window at the cherry blossoms.

I know how this works, I thought to myself, narrowing my eyes at the sky. I've read enough manga. I've seen enough anime. I am currently trapped in a high-density zone of narrative cliches.

First came the retired superhero trope—defeating a cosmic entity only to end up doing math homework two weeks later. Then came the childhood friend who moved away. And now, enter Ryone: the sweet, awkward boy who happens to be connected to a secret corporate lineage contract signed before I was even born.

It was ridiculous.

When the bell rang for lunch, I opened my shoe locker to swap my outdoor sneakers for indoor slippers. A pink, heart-sealed envelope tumbled out, landing softly on my toe.

I picked it up, staring at the delicate handwriting on the front.

> *To Banana Chan.*
>
> *Please meet me behind the old gymnasium after school.*
>
> *— Ryone*

I let out a long, dramatic sigh that nearly emptied my lungs.

"He's really doing the shoe locker love letter?" I muttered to the empty hallway. "What is this, 1998?"

When 3:30 PM rolled around, I walked around the back of the gym. The area was completely deserted except for Ryone, who was pacing back and forth so frantically he was practically wearing a groove into the dirt. He was wringing his hands, sweating through his shirt, and clutching a second, identical pink letter.

"You came!" he gasped, spinning around.

"I came," I said, leaning back against the brick wall and crossing my arms. "Look, Ryone. You seem like a nice guy, but if this is about what happened at the ice rink—"

"Banana, wait!" he interrupted, holding up his hands defensively. "There are things you don't know about me! Dark things! My family history... my father, Goro, he—"

"Stop right there," I raised a single finger, shutting him down instantly.

"Huh?"

"I don't want to hear your backstory," I said flatly.

Ryone blinked, his jaw dropping. "W-what do you mean? Everyone has a backstory!"

"And yours is clearly loaded with tragic exposition designed to make me feel sympathetic toward you," I explained with dry, surgical precision. "If you tell me your dark family secret, then we establish an emotional bond. If we establish an emotional bond, I become invested in your personal drama. If I get invested, suddenly I'm dragged into a multi-volume subplot involving secret corporate mergers, ancient Babylonian bloodlines, and probably another giant monster attack."

Ryone stared at me as if I were speaking ancient Greek. "I... I just wanted to tell you why my dad writes my name on my stuff..."

"And I am actively protecting my peace as a retired protagonist," I insisted. "I fought the Eater of Worlds, Ryone. I choked a sea monster to death with a down pillow. I am *done* with plot hooks. Keep your tragic backstory to yourself."

He stood frozen for a full five seconds before letting out a soft, defeated laugh. His sharp, vampiric canines peeked out as his posture relaxed.

"You really are completely insane, aren't you?" he asked, a genuine smile breaking through his anxiety.

"I prefer the term 'narratively efficient,'" I corrected. "Now, what did you actually want to give me?"

He looked down at the pink envelope in his hand, blushed deep red, and stuffed it into his pocket. "Nothing... just... do you want to walk to the arcade? No backstories. No family secrets. Just air hockey."

I considered it for a moment, adjusted my orange hair, and smirked. "Air hockey sounds acceptable. But if you try to reveal a tragic childhood flashback while I'm serving, I'm hitting the puck directly at your face."

Chapter 6: The Uninvited Rival and the Return of the Silver Hair

Walking through the streets of Rain with Ryone was surprisingly peaceful—until the universe remembered it hated me.

We were halfway to the arcade, passing by the central plaza near the old clock tower, when a sudden gust of wind kicked up. Swirling cherry blossom petals filled the air.

Not again, I thought, reflexively covering my nose and mouth with my sleeve. *If I start sneezing right now, someone is getting kicked.*

But it wasn't Frau Angstweiler or a monster from Egypt.

Standing at the other end of the plaza, framed by the falling petals, was a tall, lean teenage boy. He wore a crisp blue blazer, had a soccer ball tucked under his arm, and sported a mane of striking, silver hair that caught the sunlight.

My heart skipped a beat. The air in my lungs felt suddenly thin.

"No way..." I whispered.

The silver-haired boy stopped walking. His eyes locked onto mine. A brilliant, blinding smile spread across his face.

"Lacy!?" he called out, his voice echoing across the plaza.

"Boden..." I breathed.

Ryone looked between me and the newcomer, his brow furrowing in confusion. "Lacy? Who's Lacy? I thought your name was Banana?"

"It *is* Banana!" I snapped, snapping out of my daze, though my cheeks were burning.

Boden dropped his soccer ball and jogged over, completely ignoring Ryone. Before I could brace myself, he scooped me up in a tight, spinning hug, lifting my feet off the pavement.

"I found you!" Boden laughed, setting me down but keeping his hands on my shoulders. "I told you I'd come to Rain! I told you I wouldn't give up on us!"

"Boden, put me down! I'm fourteen now, you can't just throw me around!" I yelled, shoving his chest—though I didn't hit him with full force.

"You haven't changed at all," he grinned, his silver hair blowing in the wind. "Still feisty. Still wearing orange. I missed you so much."

Ryone stepped forward, clearing his throat loudly. His nervous demeanor was completely gone, replaced by a subtle, protective edge. "Excuse me. Who are you?"

Boden turned, slinging an arm casually over my shoulder. "I'm Boden Powers. Lacy's—I mean, Banana's—fiancé."

"WE ARE NOT ENGAGED!" I shrieked, elbowing Boden hard in the ribs.

"Oof!" Boden gasped, clutching his side but still grinning. "That tickles! Just like in Tokyo!"

Ryone's eyes narrowed. He looked at Boden's arm, then at me, then back at Boden. "She asked you to put her down. You should listen to her."

"And who are you supposed to be? Her bodyguard?" Boden countered, stepping closer.

"I'm Ryone," he said smoothly, taking a step toward Boden. "And I was in the middle of taking her to the arcade."

The air between the two boys turned thick and electric. I stood between them, watching the classic 'rivalry confrontation' unfold in real-time.

Great, I thought, slapping a hand over my face. Now I have a love triangle. A silver-haired childhood friend from Tokyo, and a boy with a secret corporate marriage contract. I am officially living in a light novel, and I want to request a refund.

"Look, both of you," I announced, grabbing both of their collars and yanking them apart. "I am not a trophy. I am Banana Chan. If either of you tries to start a dramatic fight in the middle of the street, I will use my wet-towel technique on both of your shins."

Both boys flinched, sensing the terrifying truth in my threat.

"Now," I adjusted my jacket. "Boden, why are you actually in Rain?"

Boden's smile faded slightly, replaced by a surprisingly serious expression. "My family moved here permanently... but that's not the only reason. Banana... something weird is happening in this town. The ocean air, the strange signals... my dad said Rain is built on top of something ancient."

I froze.

I looked at Boden. Then I looked at Ryone.

"No," I declared, holding up my hands and taking three steps backward. "No! Absolutely not! We are not doing the 'ancient town mystery' arc! I retired! I defeated the baby chick!"

"What baby chick?" Boden asked, blinking.

"I don't care!" I shouted, turning on my heel and sprinting down the street toward my house. "I'm going home to feed Doggie! Do not follow me!"

As I ran, I could hear both of their voices calling out behind me, but I didn't look back.

The retired life was getting harder by the day—but no matter what plot twists the town of Rain threw at me, Banana Chan wasn't going down without a fight.

THE END … FOR NOW?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan Holman lives in Saskatoon, Canada, where he watches a lot of TV.

EATER
OF
WORLDS